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you know him?"

"I am his sister," said Anne Marshall.

Overland was dumfounded. "His sister," he muttered, "the one he wrote to in New York. Huh! Yes; me and Billy's partners."

"Is he—is he better?" asked Anne hesitatingly.

"Better! Say, lady, excuse me if I tell you he's getting so blame frisky that he's got me scared. Why, I left him settin' on a rock eatin' a sardine sandwich with one hand and shootin' holes in all the tin cans in sight with the other. 'So long, Red!' he hollers as I lit out with the burro to cross the range. 'So long, and don't let your feet slip!' And pom! goes the 45 that he was jugglin', and another tin can passed over. He takes a bite from the sandwich, and then pom! goes the gun again, and another tin can bites the dust, just as free and easy as if he wasn't keepin' guard over thirty or forty thousand dollars' worth of gold dust and trouble, and just as if he ain't got no lungs at all."

Overland Red was concluding his last yarn, a most amazing account of the night the Plancher boys shot up Ahlene.

"It was exactly 2 o'clock by Dr. Marshall's watch."

"Both my guns was choked up with burnt powder. I reached down and borrowed two guns off a gent what wasn't usin' his jest then. Next day I was elected sheriff unanimous. They was seven of us left standin'. That was back in '98." Overland yawned and stood up.

"The boys are all asleep now," said Walter Stone. "We have plenty of room here. You'll not object to taking one of the guest rooms as you find it, I'm sure."

"For better or for worse, as the pote says." And Overland grinned. "But I got to put that little chaffer to rest somewhere."

"That's so."

"I'll go wake him up." And Overland strode to the racing car. The "chaffer" had departed for parts unknown.

"I guess he was scored at that last grade," said Overland, returning to the house. "He's gone. He must 'a' been scared to beat it back down the road afoot."

"Perhaps he has gone to the stables," said Stone. "Well, we'll take care of you here. You can see Collie in the morning."

Overland, closing the door of the spacious, cool guest room, glanced about curiously. What was it made the place seem so different from even the most expensive hotel suites? The furniture was very plain. The decorations were soft toned and simple. It's—it's because the rose girl lives here, I guess, he soliloquized. "Now, this kind of a room would just suit Billy, but it makes me feel like walkin' on eggs. This here grazin' is too good for me."

He undressed slowly, folding his unaccustomed garments with great care. He placed his automatic pistol on the chair by the bed. Then he crept beneath the sheets, forgetting to turn out the light. "Huh! Gettin' absent minded like the old professor what picked up a hairbrush instead of a lookin' glass to see if he needed shavin'." He was dum' near scared to death to see how his beard was growin'. And Overland chuckled as he turned out the lights.

He could not go to sleep at once. He missed the desert night—the spaces and the stars. "I left here in a hurry once," he muttered. "Bout three years ago. Then I was kiddin' Collie about wearin' silk pejamies. Now I got 'em—got 'em on, by thunder! Don't know as I feel any better in the inferies. And I can't show 'em to nobody. What's the good of havin' 'em if nobody knows it? But I can hang 'em on the bedpost in the mornin' careless-like, just like I was raised to it. Them pejamies cost \$4 a leg. Some class!" And he drifted to sleep.

After breakfast Dr. Marshall, who had taken a fancy to Overland, strolled with him over to the bunk house. Most of the men were on the range. Collie was assembling bits and bridles, saddles, cinchas and spurs to complete an equipment for the proposed camping trip in the hills. He was astounded at Overland's appearance. However, he had absorbed western ideals rapidly. He was sincerely glad, overjoyed, to see his old friend, but he showed little of it in voice and manner. He

shook hands with a brief "How, Red?" and went on with his work.

Dr. Marshall, after expressing interest in the equipment, excused himself and wandered over to the corral, where he admired the horses.

"Where did you get 'em?" queried Collie, adjusting the length of a pair of stirrup leathers.

"These?" And Overland spread his coatralls and ruffled. "Why, out of the old Mojave. Dug 'em up with a little pick and shovel."

"You said in your letter you found the claim."

"Uhuh. Almost fell over it before I did, though. We never found the other things by the track. New ties. No mark. Say, that Billy Winthrop I writ about is the brother of them folks stayin' here! What do you think?"

"Wish I was out there with you fellows," said Collie.

"You're doin' pretty good right here, kiddo. The boss don't think you're the worst that ever came across, and I expect the ladies can put up with havin' you on the same ranch by the way they talk. Got a hoss of your own yet?"

"Nope. I got my eye on one, though. Say, Red, this is the best place to work. The boss is fine. I'm getting forty a month now and savin' it. The boys are all right too. Brand Williams, the foreman—"

"Brand who?"

"Williams. He came from Wyoming."

"Well, this here's gettin' like a story and not like real livin'. Why, I knowed old Brand in Mex. in the old days when a hoss and a gun was about all a guy needed to set up housekeepin'. We was pals. So he's foreman here, eh? Well, you follow his trail close about cattle or hosses and you'll win out."

"I been doing that," said Collie. "The other day he told me to keep my eye on one of the boys. Silent Saunders he's called. Kind of funny. I don't know anything about Saunders."

"Well, you bank on it. Stack 'em up chin high on it, Collie, if Brand says that. He knows somethin' or he would never talk. Brand is a particular friend of yours?"

"You bet!"

"Well, tie to him. What he says is better than fine gold as the pote says. I reckon coarse gold suits me better outside of pote. How does the Saunders insee wear his clothes?"

"He's kind of lame in one arm and—here he comes now. You can see for yourself. The one on that plinto."

As Saunders rode past the two men he turned in his saddle. Despite Overland's fiery he recognized him at once. Overland's gaze never left the other's hands. "Mornin'," said Overland, nodding. "Ain't you grazin' pretty far this side of Gophertown?"

"Who the deuce are you talkin' to?" Saunders asked venomously, and his eyes narrowed.

Overland grinned and carelessly shifted the lapel of his coat, from beneath which peeped the butt of his automatic pistol. Collie felt his scalp tightening. There was something tense and suggestive in the air.

"I'm talkin' to a fella that ought to know better than to get sass to me," said Overland, "or to cut my trail like that."

Saunders rode on.

"Seen him before?" asked Collie.

"Yep. Twice—over the end of a gun. He come visitin' me and Billy at a



"A feller ought to know better than to get sass to me," said Overland.

water hole out in the dry spot. We got to exchangin' opinions. Two of

"Saunders is oranded above the elbows on both arms," said Collie. "He's been shot up pretty bad."

"You don't tell! Wonder how that happened. Mebby he was practicin' the double roll and got careless. Now, I wonder!"

"He's one of the 'bunch'!" said Collie, suddenly awake to the situation. "Come on over to the bunk house, where we can talk, Red. I'll introduce you regular to Silent."

"All right. Here, you walk on the other side, I'm left handed when I shake with him."

But Saunders was not at the bunk house. Instead he had ridden on down to the gate and out upon the Moonstone trail. He had become acquainted with Deputy Tenlow. He would make things interesting for the man who had winged him out in the desert.

Anne Marshall had stepped from the porch to the living room. Overland was alone with Louise. Facing her quickly, his easy banter gone, his blue eyes intense, untrodden, magnetic, he drew a deep breath. "They're waiting for me down the canyon about now," he said, and his tone explained his speech.

Louise frowned slightly, studying his face. "That is unfortunate just now," she said slowly.

"Or most any time—for the other fella," responded Overland cheerfully. The girl gazed at the toe of her slipper. "I know you didn't speak because you were afraid. What do you intend?"

"If I ain't oversteppin' the rules in invitin' you—why, I was goin' to say: 'Miss Lacharme, wouldn't you like to take a little buggy ride in the Guzzuh, nice and slow. She's awful easy ridin' if you don't rein her too strong.'"

"I don't know," said Louise pensively. "Your car can only hold two?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"I couldn't run away and leave Mrs. Marshall. Of course you would go on after—after we were in the valley. How could I get back?"

"That's so!" exclaimed Overland, with some subtlety, pretending he had not thought of that contingency.

"Course Collie could ride down ahead with a spare hoss. You see, the sheriff gent and Saunders—"

"Saunders! Our man Saunders?"

"Uhuh. Me and him ain't friends exactly. I figure he's rode down to tell the Tenlow man that I'm up here."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, miss. I don't make no mistakes about him."

"Then one of our men has gone to get the deputy to arrest you, and you are our guest."

"Thanks, miss, for sayin' that. It's worth gettin' pinched to be your guest."

"I did intend to ride down for the mail. Boyar needs exercisin'."

"So does the Guzzuh, miss. It's queer how she acts when she ain't been worked every day."

"I don't believe Anne would care to come in the machine. I'll ask her."

And Louise stepped to the living room, Collie, who had been watching anxiously from the corral, came across the yard to the veranda. He was dressed for riding, and he had a gun on his hip. Overland scowled. "You little idiot," he said, "when your Uncle Jack's brains got ossified just give the sad news to the press. You're jest itchin' to get in a muss and get plugged. I ain't. I figure to ride down the Moonstone trail, steerin' the Guzzuh with one hand and smellin' a bunch of roses in the other. Watch my smoke. Now, beat it!"

Louise, coming blithely from the living room, nodded to Overland. Her pensiveness had departed. Her cheeks were flushed. "Oh, Collie! Saddle Boyar!"—she began, but Overland coughed disapprovingly. He did not wish Tenlow and Saunders to suspect that the led horse was for Louise.

"Or—no. Saddle Sarko," said Louise, at once aware of Overland's plan. "And have him at the foot of the hill for me as soon as you can."

"Yes, Miss Louise." And Collie departed for the corral wondering. Overland was too much for him.

They had luncheon and allowed Collie two hours to arrive at the valley level with the led pony. After luncheon Louise appeared in riding skirt and boots. "Mr. Summers is going to take me for a ride in his new car," she said. "Don't worry, aunty. He is going to drive slowly. He finds that he has to leave unexpectedly."

"But how will you come back?" queried Anne.

"Collie has gone ahead with a spare pony. Goodbye, aunty."

"I can't thank you enough for all that you have done for Billy. I am so glad he's well and strong again. We never could manage him. Goodbye, and tell Billy he must come over and see us right away."

As Collie rode down the last pitch, leading the restive Sarko, Dick Tenlow stepped from the brush. "Mornin', Collie! Out for a little pasear?"

"Shouldn't wonder, Dick."

"Horses are lookin' good. Feed good on the hills yet?"

"Pretty good."

"I hear you got company up to the Moonstone?"

"Yep. Eastern folks, doctor and his wife." And Collie looked the deputy hard in the eye.

"Oh, that was their machine I heard coughin' up the canyon last night, eh?"

"I didn't ask them about that," replied Collie.

"You're improvin' since you first come into these hills," said Tenlow, with some sarcasm.

"I'm holdin' down a better job than I did then," said Collie good naturedly.

"Well, I ain't. I'm holdin' the same job, which you will recollect. It ain't much of a job, but it's good to requisition that cayuse you're leadin'."

"What you kiddin' about?"

"Straight goods," said Tenlow, reaching for Sarko's reins. "Just hand over your end of that rope."

"I guess not, Dick. You're on the wrong trail. What do you think I am?"

"Same as I always thought."

"Then you want to change your opinion of me," said Collie, relinquishing the tie rope. "I ain't breaking the law, but you are going to hear more about this."

"I'll risk that. You can ride right along, pronto."

"And you keep Sarko? I guess not. I'll stick."

"You can't throw no bluff this mornin'," said Tenlow.

"You got the horse, but I don't leave here without him," said Collie stubbornly. And there was an underlying assurance about Collie's attitude that perplexed the deputy, who was satisfied that the led horse was for Overland Red's use.

CHAPTER XV.

The Led Horse.

SAUNDERS, hiding in the brush, cursed Tenlow's stupidity. To have let Collie go on and have followed him under cover would have been the only sensible plan. Rapidly approximating the outcome of the muddle, Saunders untied his pony and rode back toward the ranch, taking an unused and densely covered bridle trail.

From up in the canyon came the thunder of the racing car. Far above them Tenlow and Collie could see it creeping round a turn in the road. It disappeared in a dip, to reappear almost instantly, gliding swiftly down the long slant toward the valley. The staccato drumming of the exhaust echoed along the hillside. Overland's silk hat shone bravely in the sun. Beside the outlaw was the figure of a woman. Tenlow foresaw complications and muttered profanely.

Down the next ditch rolled the car, rocking to the unevenness of the mountain road. Overland opened the



Collie's Reply Was a Flail-like Blow Between Tenlow's Eyes.

throttle, the machine shot forward and in a few seconds drew up abreast of the deputy.

"Thank you so much, Mr. Summers," said Louise, stepping from the car. "How are you, Mr. Tenlow?"

"How'do, Miss Lacharme."

"Goodby, Mr. Summers. I enjoyed the ride very much."

"Just a minute"—began the deputy. "Where's my pony, Collie? He didn't get away, did he?"

"No, ma'am. Mr. Tenlow requisitioned him. Thought I'd wait till you came along so I could explain."

"Requisitioned my pony! What do you mean?"

"It's this way, Miss Lacharme. That man there in the machine is wanted. He—"

"What has that to do with my pony, please?"

"I guess you know who he is. I figured he was layin' to get away on that pony."

"You want to go back to school, pardner, and learn to figure correct," said Overland, his foot on the accelerator pedal of the throbbing car. "One minus one is nothin'."

"Hold on there!" cried Tenlow, striding forward. Louise stood between the deputy and the car.

"My horse, please," she said quietly. As she spoke the car roared, jumped forward and shot down the smooth grade of the valley road.

"Now, Mr. Tenlow, I wish you would explain this to me and then to Uncle Walter. I sent one of our men with a horse. He was to wait for me here. What right have you to interfere with him?"

"I guess I got as much right as you have to interfere with me," said Tenlow sullenly.

"Hold on there!" cried Collie, jumping forward.

"Collie, I'll talk with him."

"Take my horse, Miss Louise," said Collie, flushing.

"No, indeed; I'll ride Sarko."

"I'll get him," said Collie.

"No. Mr. Tenlow will get him. I am sure."

"A woman can make any deal look smooth—if she is interested," said Tenlow, turning toward the brush. He came out leading the pony.

"Thank you, Collie, you may get the mail, please."

Collie stood watching her as she rode away. Then, with much deliberation, he tied his own pony Apache to a clump of greasewood. He unbuckled his belt and flung it, with gun and holster, to the ground.

"Now," he said, his face blazing white with suppressed anger, "I'm going to make you eat that speech about

any woman making things look smooth—if she's interested."

"You go on home or I'll break you in two," said Tenlow.

Collie's reply was a flail-like blow between Tenlow's eyes. The deputy staggered, gritted his teeth and flung himself at the younger man. The fight was unequal from the beginning. Apache snorted and circled as the bushes crashed and crackled.

A few minutes later Tenlow strode from the brush leading his pony. He wiped the blood and sweat from his face and spat viciously.

Louise, riding homeward slowly, heard a horse coming behind her. She reined Sarko and waited. Collie saw no way out of it, so he rode up, grinning from a bruised and battered face. "Why, Collie!"

The young man grinned again. His lips were swollen, and one eye was nearly closed.

Dismounting, Louise stepped to the ford. "Oh I'm sorry," she cried. "Your face is terribly bruised. And your

eye"—She could not help smiling at Collie's ludicrous appearance.

"I took a fall," he mumbled blandly. "Apache here is tricky at times."

Louise's gaze was direct and reproachful. "Here, let me bathe your face. Stoop down, like that. You don't look so badly, now that the dirt is off. Surely you didn't fall on your eye?"

Collie tried to laugh, but the effort was not very successful.

Tenderly she bathed his bruised face. Her nearness, her touch, made him forget the pain. Suddenly he seized her hand and kissed it, leaving a stain of blood where his lips had touched. She was thrilled with a mingled feeling of pride and shame—pride in that he had fought because of her, as she knew well enough, and shame at the brutality of the affair, which she understood as clearly as though she had witnessed it. She was too honest to make herself believe she was not flattered in a way, but she made Collie think otherwise.

He evaded her direct questioning stubbornly. Finally she asked whether Mr. Tenlow "had taken a fall" or not.

"Sure he did!" replied Collie. "A couple or three years ago—tryin' to out-ride Overland Red. Don't you remember?"

"Collie you're a regular hypocrite."

"Yes, ma'am."

"And you look—frightful."

"Yes, ma'am."

"You're not a bit ashamed."

"Yes, ma'am, I am."

"Don't say 'Yes, ma'am,' all the time. You don't seem to be ashamed. Why should you be, though? Because you were fighting?"

"No, Miss Louise. Because I got licked."

Louise mounted Sarko and rode beside Collie silently. Presently she touched his arm. "But did you?" she asked, her eyes grave and her tone conveying a subtle question about the mere letter.

"No! By thunder!" he exclaimed. "Not in a hundred years!"

"Well, get some raw meat from the cook. I'll give your explanation to Dr. and Mrs. Marshall, for you will have to be ready for the trip tomorrow. You will have to think of a better explanation for the boys."

While riding homeward, Louise dropped her glove. Collie was afoot instantly and picked it up. "Can I keep it?" he said.

The girl looked curiously at him for a moment. "No, I think not, Collie," she said gently.

Collie rode up to the corral that afternoon whistling as blithely as he could, considering his injuries. He continued to whistle as he unsaddled Apache.

At the bunk house Brand Williams looked at him once and bent double with silent laughter. The boys badgered him unmercifully. "Fell off a hoss!—Go tell that to a chink!—Who stepped on your face, kid?—Been ridin' on your map, eh?—Where was the wreck?—Who sewed up your eye?"

"S-s-h, fellas," said Miguel, grinning. "If you make all that noise how you going to hear the tune he is whistling, hey?"

Collie glanced at Saunders, who had said nothing. "Got anything to offer on the subject, Silent?" he asked.

"Nope. I take mine out in thinkin'."

"You're going to have a chance to do a whole lot more of it before long," said Collie, and he said it with a suggestiveness that did not escape the taciturn foreman, Brand Williams.

A letter from Overland informed Collie that his share in the mine to date was \$5,000, and he began planning to buy a ranch.

Hearing that the Oro foreman had offered a Yuma "outlaw" horse to any Moonstoner who could ride her, Collie determined to win the prize.

"I hear that you intend to ride the outlaw Yuma. Is it so?" Louise inquired.

Collie nodded.

"I had rather you didn't," said Louise.

"Why?" asked Collie tactlessly.

Louise did not answer, and Collie strode off feeling angry with himself and more than ever determined to risk breaking his neck to win the outlaw.

Collie, miffed because Louise selected Miguel to ride her pony Boyar in the races, placed bets against Boyar and on a buckskin pony backed by the Oro Mexicans.

Boyar, the Moonstone pony, ran second in the finals. The buckskin of the Mexicans won first place. Collie collected his winnings indifferently. He strolled over to the crowd, finding a place for himself on the corral bars.

Mat Gleason, superintendent of the Oro ranch, loomed, his back against a post. Two men, with ropes, were following the roan pony round the corral. Presently a rista dipped out and fell. Inch by inch the outlaw was worked to the snubbing post. One of the Oro

(To be Continued)

riders seized the pony's ear in his right hand, and, flinging his legs round her neck, hung, weighing her head down. There was the flash of teeth, a grunting tug at the cinchas, a cloud of dust, and Jasper Lane, foreman of the Oro outfit, was in the saddle. The cloud of dust following the roan pony grew denser. Above the dun cloud a sombrero swung to and fro fanning the outlaw's ears. Jasper Lane had essayed to ride the Yuma colt once before. His broken shoulder had set nicely—in fact, better than Bull O'Toole's leg which had been broken when the outlaw fell on him. Billy Squires, a young Montana puncher working for the Oro people, still carried his arm in a sling. All in all, the assembled company, as Brand Williams put it, "were beginning to take notice of that copper colored she-son-of-a-cyclone."

Jasper Lane piled spurs and quirt. The visiting cowmen shrilled their delight. The pony was broncho from the end of her long, switching tail to the tip of her pink muzzle.

Following a quick tattoo of hoofs on the baked earth came a flash like the trout's leap for the fly—a curving plunge—the sound as of a breaking willow branch, and then palpitating silence.

The dun cloud of dust settled, disclosing the foam flecked, sweat blackened colt, oddly beautiful in her poised immobility. Near her lay Jasper Lane face downward. The pony snuffed at his crumpled sombrero.

"That horse is plumb gentle," said Collie. "Look at her!"

"Crasy with the heat," commented Billy Dime, jerking his thumb toward Collie.

Tall, slim, slow of movement, Collie slipped from the corral bars and secured the dangling reins. The cowmen carried Jasper Lane toward the ranch house. Some one laughed.

Gleason, the superintendent, gazed at the outlaw pony and fingered his belt. "That's the fourth!" he said slowly and distinctly. "She ain't worth it."

"The fourth Oro rider," said a voice. "You ain't countin' any Moonstone riders."

"Ain't seen any to count," retorted Gleason, and there was a general laugh.

Strangely enough the outlaw pony followed Collie quietly as he led her



And Still Collie Held His Seat.

toward Gleason. "The boys say there's a bet up that nobody can stick on her two minutes. She's the bet. Is that right?" said Collie.

"What you goin' to do?" queried Gleason, and some of the Oro boys laughed.

"I don't know yet," said Collie. "Maybe I'll take her back to the Moonstone with me."

Miguel of the Moonstone removed his sombrero and gravely passed it. "Flowers for the Collie kid," he said solemnly.

Collie, grave, alert, a little white beneath his tan, called for Williams to hold the pony. Then the younger man, talking to her meanwhile, slipped off the bridle and adjusted a hackamore in its place. He tightened the cinchas. The men had ceased joking. Evidently the kid meant business. Next he removed his spurs and flung them, with his quirt, in a corner.

"Jest defending yourself, eh, Yuma girl?" he said. "They cut all the sense out of you with a horse killin' bit and rip you with the spurs and expect you to behave."

"He'll be teachin' her to say her prayers next," observed Bud Light. "He's gettin' a spell on her now."

"He'll need all his for himself," said Pars Long.